

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----129888 131536Z /40

O R 131414Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8699
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 3922

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR PINT LE IS SY
SUBJ: THE SITUATION IN LEBANON AS SEEN BY THE MINISTER OF
INTERIOR

1. DCM CALLED ON GOL MINISTER OF INTERIOR SALAH SALMAN
(A DRUZE) ON JULY 13. SALMAN MADE FOLLOWING COMMENTS:

2. HE SAID HE WAS EXTREMELY WORRIED BY THE PRESENT SITUATION.
ACCORDING TO REPORTS HE HAD RECEIVED, INCLUDING FROM HOUSE
SPEAKER KAMAL AL-ASSAD, THE SYRIANS WERE STILL DETERMINED TO
CRUSH RESISTANCE OF CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN EAST BEIRUT. HE
SAID "WE ARE GIVING LEBANON TO SYRIA ON A SILVER PLATTER AND
THERE IS NOTHING I CAN DO."

3. SALMAN SAID THAT PRESIDENT SARKIS WAS "DEPRESSED AND LOST."
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HIS CLOSEST ADVISOR, FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS, WAS BY NATURE
A PESSIMIST AND HAD NOW BECOME A "PESSIMIST SQUARED."
BOUTROS WAS NOT OVERTLY URGING SARKIS TO RESIGN, BUT WAS
HOPING SARKIS WOULD DO SO BECAUSE HE (BOUTROS) WANTED TO
QUIT. SARKIS HIMSELF SEEMED TO BE WAVERING. SOMETIMES
HE SOUNDED LIKE HE INTENDED TO QUIT WITHIN FIVE MINUTES
AND SOMETIMES HE SEEMED TO BE HINTING THAT HE MIGHT

STAY FOR MONTHS, TRYING TO WORK OUT A SOLUTION. SALMAN SAID THAT HE WOULD NOT RESIGN NOR DID HE THINK PRIME MINISTER HOSS WOULD, ALTHOUGH BOTH WOULD OF COURSE GO IF SARKIS FIRED THEM.

4. SALMAN DESCRIBED A NUMBER OF CONVERSATIONS HE AND OTHERS IN THE CABINET HAD WITH SARKIS DURING THE PAST WEEK. WHEN SARKIS FIRST ANNOUNCED HIS DETERMINATION TO RESIGN, SEVERAL CABINET MEMBERS HAD URGED HIM TO GO IMMEDIATELY ON TELEVISION, EXPLAIN HIS REASONS FOR DOING SO AND WHAT HE REQUIRED OF CHRISTIANS AND SYRIANS IN ORDER TO RESCIND HIS DECISION. SARKIS HAD PROMISED TO DO SO WITHIN 24 HOURS, BUT HAD THEN BACKED DOWN BECAUSE, HE SAID, HE COULD GET NO AGREEMENT FROM CONFLICTING PARTIES.

5. SALMAN SAID THAT SARKIS WAS A VERY SECRETIVE MAN AND THAT GOL CABINET HAD NEVER WORKED AS A TEAM, HE WAS CONVINCED THAT BOUTROS DID NOT TELL HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES EVERYTHING AND THAT VARIOUS CABINET MINISTERS HAD NEVER WORKED OUT A WAY OF COORDINATING THEIR ACTIVITIES. IN RESPONSE TO DCM'S QUESTION ABOUT WHY LEBANESE POLICE HAD NEVER BEEN STATIONED AT ADF ROADBLOCKS, SALMAN SAID HE FRANKLY DID NOT KNOW. HE HAD FREQUENTLY RAISED THIS SUGGESTION WITH SARKIS, IN HIS CAPACITY AS COMMANDER OF THE ADF, BUT HAD NEVER CONFIDENTIAL

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GOTTEN AN ANSWER. FACT THAT ADF COMMANDER SAMI KHATIB AND ISF CHIEF AHMED AL HAJJ DID NOT REPEAT NOT GET ALONG FURTHER COMPLICATED THE PROBLEM.

6. SALMAN SAID THAT HE HAD RECENTLY SPENT 48 HOURS IN THE PALACE, DURING THE SHELLING OF EAST BEIRUT, AND WAS APPALLED BY SARKIS' LACK OF STAFF. HIS ONLY CLOSE ADVISOR, SALMAN SAID, WAS FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS. WHAT PRESIDENT DESPERATELY NEEDS, SALMAN SAID, IS A COUNCIL OF ADVISORS COMPOSED OF YOUNG MEN OF ALL CONFESSIONAL GROUPS WHO COULD KEEP THE PRESIDENT INFORMED AS TO WHAT IS GOING ON, GIVE HIM ADVICE AND AT THE SAME TIME BE GROOMED TO TAKE OVER THE COUNTRY. SALMAN SAID THAT HE CANNOT BEAR THE THOUGHT OF BRINGING BACK INTO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS THE OLD MEN WHO HAVE GUIDED THE COUNTRY FOR THE LAST 30 YEARS. NEW BLOOD WAS ESSENTIAL. THE MOST USEFUL THING THE UNITED STATES COULD DO FOR LEBANON TODAY, SALMAN THOUGHT, WAS TO URGE THE PRESIDENT TO APPOINT SUCH A COUNCIL.

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 3922

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7. SALMAN SEEMED RELATIVELY UNCONCERNED ABOUT THE PROSPECT THAT SARKIS MIGHT GO THROUGH WITH HIS THREAT TO RESIGN. HE SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD BEEN DISCREDITED ALREADY IN THE EYES OF MANY PEOPLE AND EVEN IF HE RESIGNED LEGALITY COULD BE MAINTAINED. THE CONSTITUTION SAID THE PARLIAMENT SHOULD MEET "IMMEDIATELY" TO ELECT A NEW PRESIDENT, BUT "IMMEDIATELY" COULD MEAN MONTHS IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. UNDER THE CONSTITUTION, THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS WOULD TAKE OVER EXECUTIVE POWER IN THE INTERIM. SALMAN DID NOT THINK THAT PRIME MINISTER AL HOSS (WHO IS A CLOSE FRIEND OF HIS) WOULD RESIGN TO BE REPLACED BY A MARONITE BUT HE DID THINK THAT AL HOSS MIGHT AGREE TO BE FIRED IF THE RIGHT MARONITE WERE CHOSEN TO REPLACE HIM. SALMAN MENTIONED THREE NAMES THAT WERE BEING TALKED ABOUT -- MANUEL YUNIS, ABDUL AZIZ SHEHAB, AND JEAN AZIZ -- AND
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INDICATED HE DID NOT THINK THIS LIST WAS EXCLUSIVE. THE PROBLEM, HE SAID, WAS THAT SYRIA WOULD OBVIOUSLY HAVE

GREAT INFLUENCE IN THE CHOICE OF SARKIS' SUCCESSOR
AND HE WOULD BE CONSIDERED A SYRIAN STOOGES.

8. IN DISCUSSING THE PRESENT FIGHTING IN EAST BEIRUT, SALMAN REMARKED THAT THERE WERE MANY LEBANESE OF ALL CONFESSIONAL GROUPS WHO AGREED WITH THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS' DESIRE TO EXPEL THE SYRIANS FROM LEBANON. ("THEY DON'T LIKE US AND WE DON'T LIKE THEM," SALMAN SAID.) HOWEVER, AS SALIM AL HOSS HAD TOLD THE CHAMOUNS, THIS WAS NOT THE WAY TO GO ABOUT IT. SALMAN SAID THAT INFORMATION REACHING HIS OFFICE FROM ISF SOURCES AND BEIRUT HOSPITALS INDICATED THERE HAD BEEN ONLY ABOUT 35 PEOPLE KILLED AND ABOUT 200 WOUNDED IN THE BOMBARDMENT OF BEIRUT LAST WEEK, BUT HE SAID THAT THESE FIGURES MIGHT WELL BE LOW SINCE BOTH THE CHRISTIANS AND THE SYRIANS WERE MINIMIZING THEIR OWN LOSSES. (ACCORDING TO LOCAL ICRC CHIEF, HOWEVER, AT LEAST 150 LEBANESE WERE KILLED AND 400 WOUNDED.)

9. ACCORDING TO SALMAN, THE SYRIANS WERE DETERMINED TO RESUME THEIR ATTACK AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN EAST BEIRUT AND FINISH WITH THEM ONCE AND FOR ALL. HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT CONDITIONS THEY WERE DEMANDING AS THEIR PRICE FOR DESISTING. HE SAID THAT GHASSAN TUENI HAD WORKED OUT A PLAN FOR A COMPROMISE SOLUTION TO THE PRESENT PROBLEM IN EAST BEIRUT WHICH HE HAD JUST PRESENTED TO THE PRESIDENT. HE DID NOT THINK THAT SARKIS WOULD APPROVE IT BECAUSE IT WOULD REQUIRE HIM TO TAKE SOME TOUGH AND RISKY DECISIONS, SOMETHING SARKIS SEEMED INCAPABLE OF. IN CLOSING, SALMAN REPEATED THAT HE WAS VERY WORRIED AND PESSIMISTIC ABOUT WHAT MIGHT
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HAPPEN IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS.
PARKER

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Message Attributes

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